

London Borough of Camden

Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025 - 2030

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Foreword by Cllr Pat Callaghan, Cllr Sagal Abdi-Wali and Cllr Anna Wright

It is unacceptable that anyone should have to experience the harm or trauma of being made homeless. Yet there are thousands of people across the UK for whom this is the case - who are forced into inhumane and often deadly living conditions on our streets, unable to meet their most basic needs. Others are faced with extended periods of time in temporary accommodation, damaging their health and wellbeing and disconnecting them from their support networks and community.

When talking with our communities to develop our '[We Make Camden](#)' vision, our residents told us that **everyone in Camden should have a home that is safe, warm and secure**. That remains our purpose and our north star - but in the case of homelessness and rough sleeping, it is becoming harder and harder to achieve.

We are experiencing the consequences of over a decade of cuts - to local Council budgets, to physical and mental health services, and to welfare benefits. These cuts have increased the risk that people become homeless – but not increased them equally. Survivors of domestic abuse or childhood trauma, Black, Gypsy and Traveller and Roma and other ethnic minority people, LGBTQ+ people, or those with mental and physical health issues are more likely to experience homelessness and rough sleeping in their lifetime.

Local Authorities around the country do not have enough money or housing to support the rising number of people who are experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping - or those who are at risk. Many councils are close to bankruptcy due to huge increases in temporary accommodation spending. Meanwhile, our voluntary and community services are under unacceptable strain, stretching their resources to support people at the sharp end.

In Camden, we are seeing that:

- Families are leaving Camden due to housing costs - by choice or when they lose their homes. People are increasingly locked out of the housing market altogether in places they grew up, have jobs, family, schools and community.
- Private tenants are struggling to pay their rent - let alone keep up with increases - creating continuous anxiety and instability for families at the edge of financial crisis.
- Rough sleeping is at an all-time high in London and continues to increase due to a range of global and national factors largely outside of our control.
- The experience of homelessness and rough sleeping is disruptive and traumatic, posing significant risk to health, learning and wellbeing.
- Crisis found that 1 in 3 people sleeping on the street have experienced some form of violence, and 6 in 10 have been verbally abused or harassed.
- One child in each classroom in London is homeless - impacting their wellbeing, education and childhood. Increasing numbers of households in temporary accommodation means larger numbers of children and families without a home.

In Camden we benefit from a network of public, voluntary and community partners that hold knowledge, expertise and trust with communities. Working closely with partners across health, social care, community safety and housing, we are ambitious and hopeful that we can work together to make a positive difference to people's lives, delivering on the actions and campaigning goals laid out in this strategy.

The current Government has committed to working with local leaders 'to end homelessness once and for all' -, Camden is ready to work with the government to achieve this aim. This will require addressing the root causes of homelessness - poverty, poor health, high housing costs and rising domestic abuse levels, to name a few.

This draft Strategy reflects working across Council services and with partners seeking to understand where we are now and where we want to go from here. Our joint introduction reflects our belief that we cannot tackle the causes, risk and harm homelessness and rough sleeping without working across housing, health, care and community services.

We will continue advocating locally, regionally and nationally for a fairer system that prevents homelessness in the first instance, treats everyone with dignity and care, and supports people into stable long-term housing. We welcome feedback and suggestions from citizens, communities, partners, service providers and people with lived experience of homelessness to ensure that we are working together to have the biggest impact.

Cllr Sagal Abdi-Wali, Cabinet Member for Better Homes

Cllr Patricia Callaghan, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities

Cllr Anna Wright, Cabinet Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Social Care

Overview of our priorities for 2025 - 2030

This Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy reviews and reflects on our previous strategy published in 2019. It also sets out actions for how the Council will respond to current and projected challenges between now and 2030.

We have heard from people with experience of homelessness, partners and community groups throughout the development of this strategy, about how they think public, voluntary and community organisations should work together, how people experience homelessness in Camden, how the current system helps or hinders them, and what changes they need from the national government.

This builds on years of learning and collaborative working, experimentation and research with people with lived experience of homelessness - through the challenges of the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis and the homelessness emergency we now face.

Working within this challenging political and economic context, this strategy is guided by the following principles:

- We believe homelessness should be rare, brief and non-recurrent – and the way to do this is by ensuring any policies or services are informed by people’s experience of homelessness.
- We will act to prevent homelessness where possible – ensuring local people have access to a wide range of information, support and services that are right for them.
- When homelessness does occur, we will be proactive in finding housing options for people that are affordable, accessible, safe and stable, and relieve their homelessness.
- Homelessness and poor health come hand in hand - beyond finding stable housing, our services should work together to secure the best outcomes for people, including helping them to recover and improve their health and wellbeing.
- We believe the best route to supporting people and reducing the risk of recurrent homelessness is through joint working across housing, health, care, employment and community services, and creating opportunities for people with experience of homelessness to steer change.
- Our homelessness and rough sleeping services should be specific to people’s experience, and should provide people with a way-in to access other important services.

Reflecting with our partners, our services and what we have heard so far from people with lived experience, our priorities are:

Priority 1	<p>Prevent homelessness and rough sleeping</p> <p>The Council alone cannot prevent homelessness or rough sleeping - in order to make real change we need to work with partners, communities and people to share resources, insight and data to identify people more at risk and intervene to support them as early as possible</p>
Priority 2	<p>Provide joined-up housing, health and social care support that reduces harm and improves health and wellbeing</p> <p>Where homelessness does occur we need to act to make it as brief as possible - recognising that homelessness exists alongside, and can even be caused, or exacerbated by, wider needs and disadvantages. Our services need to work together to provide information and support that responds to these needs and is person-centred, relational and trauma-informed</p>
Priority 3	<p>Secure more housing for people that is accessible, affordable and long-term</p> <p>Stable housing is essential for enabling people to (re)build their lives. We need to understand people's individual priorities for their housing and have a diversity of local housing options available to meet their needs</p>
Priority 4	<p>Campaign for change nationally and share our learning</p> <p>We cannot end or reduce homelessness and rough sleeping without structural change that addresses the underlying causes of poverty and housing insecurity, and increases the powers and resources available to Councils, the homelessness sector and communities</p>

How we want to work to achieve our priorities

There is still work to be done to ensure that we work consistently across the borough and across London to provide the best support to people experiencing, recovering from, or at risk of homelessness. Reflecting on this work, we believe the following values should guide how we work in partnership to achieve our priorities:

Champion equity - We recognise and advocate for groups and communities that experience homelessness disproportionately, and ensure our services address these inequalities, including for (but not limited to), Black, Gypsy, Traveller and Roma and other minority ethnic people, disabled and LGBTQ+ people, women, care leavers and people with experience of domestic abuse or the criminal justice system.

Person-centred – As explained by the Centre for Homelessness Impact ([SHARE](#)), person-centred care supports people to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to more effectively manage and make informed decisions about their own housing, health and health care. Such care is coordinated and tailored to the needs of the individual. Crucially, it ensures that people are always treated with dignity, compassion and respect.

Relational - We understand that our relationships with people, partners, providers and staff must be characterised by trust, mutual respect and sharing of power, and we must be responsive to everyone's needs, strengths and ambitions recognising that everyone is different and will have a unique story to tell about their own experience.

Preventative - We require services across housing, homelessness, health and social care to identify the risks and drivers of homelessness as early as possible, and have processes set up to prevent homelessness when risks are identified.

Trauma-informed - People may experience trauma due to adverse early life experiences, as a result of negative experiences with services or as a result of working with traumatised people with scarce resources. We therefore need to design and provide services that recognise the multiple impacts of trauma on both those accessing and providing services.

Psychologically-informed – As explained by [Homeless Link](#), adopting a psychologically informed approach is about the development, delivery and evaluation of services, taking into account the emotional and psychological needs of individuals using them. This approach centres on the psychological safety and security for people accessing and working in services, encouraging a more reflective way of working.

Led by experience - We believe that people with experience of homelessness have the skills, knowledge and insight to make the best decisions to improve their own lives, with the right support. We invite people with lived and living experience of homelessness to work with us in designing services and policies that affect local people.

Driven by insight and learning - We acknowledge the wealth of insight and best practice that our staff, partners and people with lived experience bring to the table,

and ensure our services are informed by this. We will learn from national, local and service-specific data to continuously improve services for the benefit of local people.

Supporting collaborative leadership - We will actively bring together partners to understand and tackle problems together - valuing the immense knowledge and expertise our partners bring to the table.

What do we mean by ‘homelessness’ and ‘rough sleeping’?

Central Government requires all housing authorities to outline their approach to managing their ‘statutory’ homelessness duties – these are legal obligations placed on local authorities via the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. According to statutory definitions for homelessness services, there are two broad categories of homelessness:

- **Statutory homelessness** this refers to the duties placed on local authorities to deliver advice and assistance to households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness as set out in the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness Act 2002. Those people who have made a homelessness application to their local authority and are not otherwise ineligible for assistance (such as some persons from abroad) are assessed against the necessary criteria set out in the legislation to determine whether duties are owed which may include an offer of temporary accommodation for households who are eligible for assistance, homeless and in priority need. Those in priority need might include families, pregnant people and single people with vulnerabilities. A household may be statutorily homeless if they are going to be evicted or are living in accommodation that is unsuitable, and it is not reasonable for them to remain living there; including if it is probable that this will lead to domestic abuse or other violence.
- **Non-statutory / non-priority homeless** is often single people or couples without dependent children who are not assessed as being in priority need and are only entitled to advice and assistance from the local authority. People who fall within this group are offered housing advice which could involve looking for private rented accommodation or applying for welfare funding (such as rent in advance payments through a local welfare provision scheme).

There are also wider statutory duties relating to homelessness that we need to consider in the context of this strategy - for example our duty to safeguard adults with care and support needs (Care Act 2014) and our duty to safeguard children and young people, particularly those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness (Children Act 1989 and 2004). Safeguarding principles are for this reason at the forefront of our approach to homelessness prevention and response.

We know there are people who are experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping who have not approached our housing and homelessness teams, but may have engaged with our wider services like Health, Social Care, Youth Services, Domestic Abuse and Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG), and Debt and Poverty. These people may be living with friends or relatives for a short amount of time, living in temporary accommodation provided by the Council such as hostels, night shelters and refuges, or living with the threat of eviction from their own homes. Understanding the different forms of homelessness along with different personal circumstances is essential in providing the right support.

When we talk about **rough sleeping**, this refers to when someone has nowhere safe to stay and is sleeping outside on the ground or in a tent, doorways, parks,

stairwells, bus shelters, car parks and other places not designed for habitation. It can include people who sleep in public places that are open all day (for example A&E departments and fast-food restaurants) and those that walk all night or use public transport to sleep on.

The reality is that the majority of people experiencing homelessness are not sleeping on the streets - they are more likely to be families or single people who live in a near-permanent state of housing instability. They may have 'a roof over their heads but not a permanent home to build a life and flourish' ([Single Homeless project](#)).

Single homeless people are often described as "hidden homeless", which is to say that they could be "sofa surfing", staying with friends or family and not accessing mainstream homelessness services. This often results in overcrowding and challenges for households that are housing people and families that would otherwise be homeless. It also means that people with 'hidden' care and support needs may not be aware of - or be receiving - the right support in the right place.

It is critical that we address homelessness and rough sleeping in all its forms - everyone has a right to live an active and fulfilling life regardless of their circumstances. With this goal in mind, it is important that we understand and address people's experience of '**Multiple Disadvantage**' - when people experience challenges that are co-occurring (experienced at the same time) and mutually reinforcing (making each other worse). That might include long-term experiences of poverty, abuse, neglect, trauma, ill-health and drug and alcohol use. This can then manifest in a combination of worsening health, homelessness, domestic abuse, gendered violence and criminal justice involvement. People who have experienced multiple disadvantage often tell us that they feel let down by services that focus on single issues or 'conditions' and we want to act to remove these barriers and stop this happening.

For these reasons it is important that we consider what good support looks like for people long before they are technically 'homeless' or 'at risk', and also in combination with wider services and support. There is a lot of work that happens outside of 'homelessness services' that prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place. For this reason, we have brought together partners across Education, Employment, Health and Wellbeing (Public Health) and Adult and Children's Social Care services to develop this strategy.

Please see the appendix for descriptions and links to Camden's other statutory responsibilities.

Summary Information from our Homelessness Data Review

Below is a summary of key data points from our Homelessness Review. Section 1(1) of the Homelessness Act 2002 gives housing authorities 'the power to carry out a homelessness review and formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of the review'. The purpose of the review is to 'determine the extent to which the population in the district is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, assess the likely extent in the future, identify what is currently being done and by whom, and identify what resources are available, to prevent and tackle homelessness.'

In Camden, there are a wide range of factors pushing people into vulnerable situations, often leading to homelessness, these include: the high cost of rent, a reduction in the availability of rental properties, cuts to benefits and the gap between local housing allowance and the cost of rent, an increase in poverty following the cost of living crisis, domestic abuse, and leaving Home Office accommodation. This paints a challenging picture for homelessness in Camden, but is necessary for us to understand, prioritise and plan for future homelessness in Camden, and decide on where we want to engage government for more support and funding.

It is important to note that certain groups are often under-represented in statistics because, as mentioned above, they are not as 'visible' when homeless. For example, they might sit on night buses, walk throughout the night, sit in fast-food restaurants, in unsafe accommodation or stay with people who might exploit them. These experiences are especially common among women, but also young people. We have invested in work to understand more about these experiences including supporting pilots for women's and young people's homelessness census work.

Overview

Camden housing costs are incredibly high - and increasing

- House prices have **increased by 73% over 15 years** - from £509k in 2008 to £881k on average in 2023
- The **average rent in Camden makes up over 65% of median pay in 2024** - with the unaffordability of the borough having a direct impact on households approaching for homelessness support
- **In February 2023 asking rents were close to 20 per cent higher than they were at the start of the first COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020** - these have continued to increase. The average monthly private rent in Camden was £2,482 in August 2024
- Over **8000 households are now on the Camden social housing register** waiting for access to stable, affordable housing

There is a large population of people who could be at risk of homelessness due to debt or immigration status

- We are seeing significant increases in the financial hardship experienced by households in Camden. There **are 7,108 households in Council Tax arrears**

as of July 2024. Our LIFT data estimates that **around 5,577 households in Camden are in rent arrears**

- Nationally, there has been a **239% increase in homelessness among asylum seekers evicted from Home Office accommodation** including hotels in two years. Camden saw a steep increase in applications from people leaving immigration accommodation from **74 (2%) in 2022/23 to 360 (9%) in 2023/24**

We are seeing increases in homelessness and rough sleeping across Camden

- In Camden in 2023/24 there were **1084 households** assessed as being **owed a duty** under the Homelessness Reduction Act. This is alongside a significant increase in statutory homelessness presentations between 2022/23 to 2023/24 **with an increase from 2,458 to 3,548.**
- In 2024, there were **603 individuals living in 16 schemes in the Adult Pathway** (which is Camden's system of hostels and supported housing)
- The number of **households in temporary accommodation has increased from 498 in 2019 to over 1000 in March 2025** - we often have **limited options** to move these families into stable, long-term accommodation - meaning more families and households are staying in temporary accommodation for longer periods
- We are seeing significant increases in people sleeping rough on Camden's streets, second only to the London Borough of Westminster in London. **In 2023/24 there were 903 people seen rough sleeping in Camden, compared to 719** in the previous year – with the most significant increase seen in people who had not been seen rough sleeping in the year before (491 people of the 903 seen in 2023/24)

People are approaching the Council for support at different times for different reasons

- The majority of people who approach the council for support are at the stage where they are at high risk, or already experiencing some form of homelessness – **66% of those owed a duty in 2024 were already homeless and owed what is called a “relief duty”.** We have seen a comparative **reduction in people approaching the Council at a “prevention” stage – from 33% in 2019, to 14% in 2024**
- In Camden in 2023/24, for those seeking help from the Council before they are homeless (252 households), the most common reasons are **loss of private rented sector accommodation (49%)** and **friends and family no longer willing or able to accommodate (34%)**
- However those approaching at a stage when they are already homeless in 2023/24 (832 households), the most common reasons are **friends and family being no longer willing or able to accommodate (29%), issues of domestic abuse (16%)** and **loss of private rented sector tenancy (12%)**

Black, African and Black British and Roma people are more at risk of homelessness

- **Over 25%** of those owed a housing duty in 2023/24 identified as **Black, African, Caribbean or Black British**, despite the national census indicating that only 9% of the population identify this way - meaning Black residents are disproportionately at risk of homelessness
- This is similar to statistics for people seen rough sleeping in Camden, where **23.8% of people identify as Black or Black-British in 2023/24**
- People from the Roma community are over-represented in rough sleeping statistics with **12% of people seen rough sleeping in 2023/24 identifying as “White-Roma”** despite this accounting for 0.5% of the population in the 2021 census

Young people are at greater risk of homelessness

- In 2023/24 there are a **large number of young people owed a prevention or relief duty** aged between 18-24 (13.2%) and 25-34 (34.1%) with again these being higher than the representations of these groups in our demographic data - meaning younger people are more at risk of homelessness than other age groups
- Camden participated in the first **Young People’s Rough Sleeping Census Pilot** in 2024, which indicated that more young people could be sleeping rough than official statistics suggest – as **more than a quarter of those surveyed (28%) had slept rough in London but were not recorded in official data**

Poor mental and physical health, disability are contributing factors to homelessness

- 27.5% of those owed a prevention or relief duty had a **history of mental health problems**. 20.6% had an experience of **physical ill health and disability**.
- UK-wide research suggests that **12.3% of people experiencing homelessness are autistic**, compared with 1-2% of the general population

Women experience homelessness in different ways to men

- The London Women’s Census in 2023 estimates that the **number of women rough sleeping could be double the London CHAIN data estimates** because of the different ways in which sleep rough across the city
- Research from Crisis found that **61% of homeless women in Great Britain had experienced abuse from a partner** – and this is a key driver of homelessness presentations in Camden particularly for women
- Domestic violence and abuse is a key driver of homelessness (particularly for women) particularly at the relief stage (where people are already homeless)

where **domestic violence and abuse is a reason for homelessness in over 16% of cases in 2023/24**

Camden has made significant investments in tackling homelessness and rough sleeping

- Camden has relatively **low levels of care leavers owed a duty** - with just over 1% of approaches (ten individuals) being from people with an experience of care and Camden has made care experience a protected characteristic in the Borough
- Over the last four years the Council has run the Temporary Accommodation Purchasing Programme (TAPP) alongside CIP to support the delivery of increased temporary accommodation in Camden. **To date through TAPP the Council has bought 209 additional affordable homes**. In addition to these, we **started the construction of 89 temporary accommodation homes** in November 2024
- The Council's Family Friendly Programme will provide **280 additional bedspaces** through the purchase of family sized homes, funded through the release of smaller homes
- Camden **forecasted spent this year (2024/25) on tackling homelessness is £39 million** - this figure includes the forecasted spend on rough sleeping, temporary accommodation, homelessness prevention and our supported pathways and commissioned services, it does however exclude additional spend in supporting homeless families in adult social care and health services

Our view of future demand is that the causes and underlying pressures resulting in increases in homelessness are likely to continue over the next four to five years. Shelter in 2025 made national predictions about the continuing pressures on homelessness services – if those predictions are correct Camden would expect around 1,400 households in temporary accommodation by 2029. Our draft Strategy seeks to take this data and potential continuation of trends into account when formulating our priorities.

Priority 1 - Prevent homelessness and rough sleeping

Homelessness is preventable but it requires a bold action across the public sector and community services. As a local authority who works closely with people experiencing homelessness, we understand how adverse life experiences can increase the risk of homelessness – and we recognise we aren't always in the right place at the right time to prevent homelessness from happening.

Given the increasing volatility of the rental market in Camden and increasing pressure on household incomes, we need to provide more support to those who are at risk of losing their homes, so that they can sustain their tenancies. We also need to make best use of the shared data and knowledge that exists across our public, voluntary and community sector to provide proactive support – particularly to people who are at increased risk of homelessness, e.g. Black people and minority ethnic people, care leavers, LGBTQ+, disabled and young people.

Where we are now

Camden has historically invested strongly in homelessness prevention, providing advice and support that helps people navigate housing challenges, or helps them stay in their current homes (or 'sustain their tenancy'). This includes:

- Investing in our voluntary and community sector partners that provide accessible, high-quality advice, information and advocacy to residents and people at risk of homelessness.
- Providing financial support for people to remain in their homes, whether that is in response to increased rents or rent arrears.
- Housing staff working one-to-one with households to provide expert and personalised advice and support to avoid homelessness.
- Over 1000 supported accommodation places for people to prevent homelessness. This includes 700+ beds of supported accommodation available to homeless people with support needs via the Adult Pathway - this pathway is available to those rough sleeping but also to those who make homelessness applications as a form of prevention. This pathway provides immediate housing for people, with a view to supporting them into longer-term accommodation.
- The Council also commissions supported living pathways for people with mental health needs, learning disabilities and autism, and for care experienced young people. These pathways are essential in supporting people to move away from homelessness and build independent living skills for the future.

The reality is that the kind of prevention outlined above cannot *on its own* address the increasing risk of homelessness and rough sleeping in Camden. Many people sleeping rough in the borough come to Camden from out of borough once they have already become homeless. This means that the first opportunity to prevent their homelessness occurred before they even arrived in Camden.

We know from our Review, that whilst the major causes of homelessness in Camden are tenancies ending and family and friends no longer being able to accommodate, there is rarely a single issue that causes homelessness - many people are at risk due to a combination of intersecting needs and hardships, such as domestic abuse, poverty, discrimination and leaving institutions (such as hospitals, care, prisons and Home Office accommodation). We need to work with public services, voluntary partners and communities to make support more visible to people, so that they get appropriate support for their situation.

We want to tackle the root causes of homelessness. Although we already work with partners across housing, health, and social care to support a wide range of personal, housing and community needs such as debt, arrears, isolation, eviction, disability and mental health – we need greater support from across the public sector to prevent more people from experiencing homelessness. This will enable us to better utilise our understanding of the types of institutional and life experiences that can lead to homelessness - and strengthen the range of support offered to residents before or when these events occur.

What is the change we want to see?

- Increased awareness across our communities of the risks and causes of homelessness.
- Reduced stigma and increased community support for people experiencing homelessness so that stigma is never a barrier to accessing support.
- People approach sources of advice, support and care earlier and avoid experiencing homelessness in the first place.
- People who work in local public, voluntary and community services know about homelessness and how to direct people to support.
- People who are at increased risk of homelessness receive proactive outreach, advice and whole-person support.
- Partners across housing, health and social care work closely together to provide proactive, trauma-informed, person-centred support to a person or family as a whole, rather than addressing isolated needs.

What action will we take?

Prevent by Tackling Poverty

- Work with Debt Prevention team to run proactive campaigns, identifying early indicators of debt and offering preventative support before homelessness risk escalates.
- Ensure private tenants at risk of homelessness are aware of, and know how to access, Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs). Focus the use of our DHPs to support those at most risk of homelessness.

- Connect people to good jobs, apprenticeships and training via Good Work Camden, and ensure those using the service are aware of how to access wider advice, support and resources that reduce the risk of homelessness.

Work with groups at greater risk of homelessness

- Use our data and insights to understand inequalities that lead some groups and communities to being more at risk of homelessness, and provide support through specialised programmes e.g. Accommodation for Ex-Offenders pilot, Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance, working with those leaving Home Office accommodation or with no recourse to public funds.
- Continue working with the NHS to provide support for people discharged from hospital and at risk of homelessness, particularly those experiencing multiple disadvantage.
- Gain a clearer understanding of 'risk points' and 'revolving doors', working with public sector partners like GPs and hospitals, to avoid recurrence of homelessness for those at risk.
- Ensure that communication with people experiencing homelessness, and between services, is timely, empathetic and effective.

Test and Learn as a Partnership

- Share learning across Debt and Financial Resilience, Housing, Homelessness and wider Council and community partner teams to understand what works best when providing long-term preventative homelessness support, especially when it involves multiple services.
- Continue to collect data, insight and evidence on the needs and impact of 'hidden homelessness', and how we can provide the best support. This means looking beyond conventional data sources that fail to account for these experiences.
- Respond to, and embed, the findings of the upcoming evaluation of the first three years of the Homelessness System Programme.
- Undertake an evaluation of Housing First and learn from our Housing First programmes to consider what housing-led support we could develop further.

Priority 2 - Provide joined-up housing, health and social care support that reduces harm and improves health and wellbeing

Experiencing homelessness is traumatic and disruptive. While we think it is unacceptable that anyone should have to experience homelessness, we know that the housing crisis and inadequate homelessness funding means it will continue to be a reality for many individuals and families. Therefore, our position is that when homelessness does occur, we will do everything we can to minimise harm and make it as brief as possible, ensuring people are able to access the right support at the right time. This means ensuring services across Housing, Health, Social Care, Justice and wider support services respond quickly and flexibly and work together to plan and address concerns and risks.

Whilst a safe, warm and secure home is fundamental to ending homelessness, we cannot 'solve' a person's homelessness by simply providing them with shelter. Reducing harm caused by homelessness means working with a person or family closely to understand and support their health, wellbeing, financial, community and personal needs. It can also be understanding the factors causing homelessness – as well as strengths and resources. This 'whole-person' or 'whole-family' approach enables us to develop a support plan (and where relevant - a safeguarding plan) that is specific to the individual or family.

We are investing in 'relational' services that are sensitive to trauma, create psychological and physical safety, build trust and help people heal and recover. We know that people experiencing homelessness have knowledge, skills, ambitions and strengths that can help them to improve their situation and reduce the risk of recurrent experiences of homelessness.

Where we are now

Multiple disadvantages have become increasingly common among individuals and families approaching us for homelessness support and rehousing - from traumatic life experiences, poor mental and physical health and drug and alcohol support needs, to experiences of domestic abuse, violence and discrimination. For children in families experiencing homelessness, there is a significant knock-on impact on their education, health and wellbeing. People experiencing homelessness have far worse health outcomes than other groups. Mortality rates are higher, and morbidity trends show that infections, cardiovascular and respiratory conditions, premature ageing, and high frailty scores are all more prevalent. Barriers to accessing services mean that issues remain untreated until they become very severe and complex.

In order to meet a person's needs to their fullest extent we must work closely with people, communities, providers and partners in order to build trusting and effective partnerships and ensure people don't fall through the gaps of traditional services.

In 2022, Camden launched the Homelessness System Transformation (now called Homelessness System Partnership), a programme of work that recognises that no single organisation or service can address every need of someone experiencing homelessness. The Partnership brings together people and organisations to improve access to and experience of services, shaped by what people with lived experience

tell us is important to them. The programme aims to improve the response to homelessness across all services in the borough so people can access the care and support they need to lead the lives they want, away from homelessness.

At the heart of this programme is the principle and value of ‘co-production,’ which refers to a way of working where service providers work in equal partnership with people with lived experience of an issue to reach a collective outcome. This approach has created opportunities for staff and partners to work together with people with experience of homelessness to design, test and implement solutions and influence change,

Through a series of workshops, conversations, co-production and in-depth research, colleagues across the homelessness system and people with lived experience told us:

- No single service or organisation alone can address an individual’s homelessness and wider needs driving their homelessness. Yet, **services often tend to focus on one issue at a time** and there is a lack of communication across services.
- **Services aren’t always flexible enough** to accommodate the different ways that residents need to engage with them, e.g. limited face-to-face support, or fixed appointment times.
- **People experiencing homelessness can feel over-assessed. Having to repeat your story multiple times** can be re-traumatising, exhausting and confusing. There is a need for a culture shift towards more relational practice, rooted in taking a ‘trauma informed’ approach.
- **It is very hard for residents, and staff, to know what support is available.** The system is complex and ever-changing due to the nature of funding to the sector.
- **Stigma, discrimination and a lack of understanding** regarding homelessness is a major barrier to accessing services. Assumptions about homelessness being a lifestyle choice and a lack of understanding about multiple disadvantage can impact how someone is received in services.

These reflections have informed this Draft Strategy and will continue to guide future work.

What is the change we want to see?

- Support provided to people is relational, trauma- and psychologically informed and non-stigmatising, and is responsive to different cultures, ethnicities, genders, sexualities and disabilities (and their intersections).
- Services are flexible and responsive, including when people are at risk of harm, violence and criminal exploitation. Rigid practices are removed and therefore improving the safety, health and wellbeing of residents.

- There are more trusting relationships between people and services, and also between the people trying to tackle homelessness in communities, other partner organisations and the council. This will mean people are more likely to access the support they need at the right time for them.
- Services across the borough work closely together, communicating effectively and sharing knowledge and information for a more 'holistic' experience for the person seeking support, and prevent them from having to repeat their story unnecessarily. Risks and concerns are discussed and managed collaboratively.
- There is a shared understanding of the impact trauma has on people and how it impacts service delivery. Organisations are able to identify their strengths and weaknesses and improve their services accordingly.
- There is improved access to healthcare, social care and support for those who have co-occurring needs, especially mental health, physical health and drug and alcohol use. Therefore, the health status and long-term outcomes of people who are homeless are improved.
- There is a common understanding and set of measures for what constitutes 'good' practice. Across the borough we share our knowledge and learning so all organisations can benefit, and we target resources where they will have most benefit.
- Organisations across Camden have improved understanding of homelessness and are part of a more coordinated and collaborative system. Through this improved understanding, stigma associated with homelessness is reduced.
- People with lived experience of homelessness have more control and autonomy over the decisions that affect their lives, working with public, voluntary and community services in Camden that share power with them through co-production.
- Each person rough sleeping in the borough knows how to access support, and they are supported to develop, alongside specialist teams, a plan that provides them with a route away from rough sleeping.

What action will we take?

Learn from lived experience

- Continue to centre, champion and fund co-production approaches and share best practice, as has been successful in the Homelessness System Partnership.
- Continue to ensure people with lived experience are partners in decision-making processes, service and strategy development that impacts the lives of people experiencing homelessness.

- Gather more evidence and data on the variety of experiences of homelessness in Camden with a focus on intersectionality. We want to increase our understanding of the experiences of families in temporary accommodation so that we can effectively support this growing group.

Trauma-informed Services

- Train staff and partners to recognise and respond to safeguarding concerns for people experiencing homelessness, be curious and not make assumptions. This includes identifying signs of abuse, neglect and exploitation, understanding referral processes, local safeguarding protocols and relevant legislation, e.g. Homelessness Reduction Act, Care Act, Human Rights Act.
- Support people and organisations across the borough to use the Personal Passport when supporting people experiencing homelessness. The Personal Passport is a trauma-informed and co-produced tool that contains information about a person experiencing homelessness, described in their own words, that can be shared with different teams and workers. It can be used as part of a professional referral, or ahead of an assessment to prevent repetition and re-traumatisation, as well as supporting relationship building and understanding.
- Support staff and partner organisations to use the Camden Trauma Informed Framework, including when recommissioning hostel and rough sleeping services. The framework describes what trauma-informed approaches are, how we define trauma, ways of supporting the workforce, and principles and practice.
- Review our practices around staff wellbeing and support. This will ensure we support staff retention, protect against burnout and give people as much time as possible to build relationships and trust.
- Develop the council's and commissioned providers' (such as our rough sleeping outreach team) working relationship through joint outreach, shared community of practice and regular meetings with the Police and other enforcement and criminal justice teams. We can share best practice on trauma informed approaches and understanding of homelessness which is particularly important when working with multiply disadvantaged people to ensure people who are homeless are protected from harm

Work in partnership

- In line with our 'Neighbourhoods approach', multi-agency support for people experiencing homelessness will be practiced and integrated across the borough, supporting our ambition that there are place-based responses to local needs.

- As a local authority we will work with other public bodies and the voluntary and community sector in commissioning and strategic planning of services for people experiencing homelessness. This includes working closely with neighbouring boroughs, regional bodies and central government.
- Ensure that we have a consistent and collaborative approach to addressing safeguarding risks across the borough of Camden, that is understood and championed by relevant organisations and leaders.
- Continue to embed across the system a 'Team Around Me' approach to supporting adults who have multiple disadvantages, including homelessness. This approach is strengths based, puts the person at the centre of their support and creates a uniform and consistent way of multiple teams working together.
- Work with Camden's Integrated Care Board, mental health Trust and Hospital teams to ensure health services are responsive to the needs of people experiencing homelessness in Camden, deliver services in line with NICE guidance and are integrated within the wider system. Services will be flexible and adaptive around a client's needs; there will be shared assessment and care across different teams; and support is long-term and takes an assertive approach.
- Recommission our Routes off the Street service and Adult Pathway services in line with multi-agency working and trauma-informed best practice, ensuring more joint outreach between these services, health, social care and others, as well as exploring greater co-location of services.
- Alongside our work to reduce households in temporary accommodation, continue to develop our temporary inclusion offer that provides holistic support to families and children to reduce adverse social and psychological impacts.

Priority 3 - Secure more housing for people that is accessible, affordable and long-term

Stable housing is essential in preventing people from becoming homeless, as well as in enabling people to rebuild their lives after an experience of homelessness. We want to understand people's individual priorities for their housing, and have a range of good quality and affordable options available to meet their needs - from temporary accommodation to social housing.

Faced with a housing crisis, we need to be creative in finding housing to support people experiencing homelessness in Camden. This means ensuring that all forms of housing are well connected to council, voluntary and community services, so that those experiencing, recovering from or at risk of homelessness, can easily access the support and care they need to reduce future risks of homelessness.

Where we are now

We are in the midst of a housing crisis - there are fewer numbers of private rented sector homes available on the market, rent prices are increasing without any regulatory limits, and fewer properties are being let to low-income households. On top of this, our social housing register is increasing in size. All of this is resulting in a greater number of people struggling to find safe, secure and affordable housing.

Camden has built over 1,700 homes as part of our Community Investment Programme, of which 70% are affordable. However, we are unable to build enough affordable housing to meet demand. Temporary accommodation options are limited and expensive, and long stays can often negatively impact an individual's or family's homelessness situation.

Camden has invested in a large hostel 'pathway' of over 700 beds that provides immediate access to housing for single adults who require support to lead fulfilling and independent lives - and we are investing in more hostel pathway spaces. Additionally, Camden has invested in three 'off the street accommodation' hostels for immediate access for people rough sleeping.

We know that providing secure and long-term housing as quickly as possible is a crucial first step in addressing or preventing homelessness, which is why we continue to explore new Temporary Accommodation options, 'Housing First' models, 'Move-on' support and development of affordable housing.

What is the change we want to see?

- There is more affordable housing in Camden - ranging from social rent housing, intermediate and affordable rented housing.
- There are more temporary accommodation options for individuals and families, and everyone in temporary accommodation receives the care and support they need.

- People have more information about how to navigate the homelessness system so they can make informed choices about their housing.
- The private rented sector in Camden provides more stability and high-quality housing for more people.
- People are supported to sustain their tenancies after moving out of supported housing.

What action will we take?

More affordable and quality housing in Camden

- Continue to build more social housing and intermediate housing through the Council's Community Investment Programme (CIP) alongside supporting more homes to come forward through our planning powers.
- Buy more former right-to-buy homes to increase Camden's social housing stock which gives it the flexibility to use existing stock as temporary accommodation.
- Review our Housing Allocations Policy to consider how our social housing contributes to addressing homelessness.
- Protect houses in multiple occupation (HMO) as many people are unable to access or afford alternative accommodation. Use our HMO Licensing scheme to improve conditions in the private rented sector.

Investment in Supported Housing

- Grow the 'Housing First' model for the borough, including building 30 Housing First units by the end of 2024/25.
- Review housing-led approaches to supporting people with multiple-disadvantages and care and support needs to maintain independent tenancies. We will support more joined-up offers across council departments to deliver this, especially Social Care, Health and Housing.
- Review and recommission our supported housing portfolio in line with the principles of this Strategy
- Review how we adapt and provide accessible homes to assist older people, homeless people and other people with care or support requirements to live as independently as possible. A high proportion of people experiencing homelessness (or at high risk) are disabled and/or have mobility needs.
- Explore ways to expand our Young People's Pathway provision, and provide supported accommodation for homeless young people beyond the care-experienced cohort.

- Explore a new 'House Project' for care experienced young people, that supports collaborative work to develop shared living skills, access support, and to live independently within a community of support.
- Continue to invest in more family-type settings for care experienced over 18s, such as 'staying put' arrangements and shared lodgings.

Priority 4 - Campaign for change nationally and share our learning

We cannot prevent, reduce or end homelessness without greater powers and funding being made available to Councils and communities. We want to create an effective local system that addresses the causes and drivers of poverty at the earliest stage, and provides the supportive interventions required to support Camden's most 'at risk' populations.

Where we are now

The current housing and homelessness crisis cannot be solved by local councils alone - we can only seek to reduce harm and avoid crisis as far as possible. National policy decisions around Local Housing Allowance restrictions, the Universal Credit transition or evictions of asylum seekers from Home Office accommodation, make it harder for people to make ends meet, and is why we see a year-on-year increase in people approaching the council for homelessness support.

Given the increasing volatility of the rental market increasing pressure on household incomes, we need support from central government to enable us to address gaps in our funding and in our welfare system, design better services that respond to local need, regulate local housing markets and increase our housing supply.

We want to work with other London boroughs and local authorities across the UK to make the case to central government for why they need to address key issues in the current regional and national approach, including short-term funding, lack of support options for people with no recourse to public funds, and inflexibility in some specific policies that make delivering good services more challenging (such as the CHAIN verification process).

What we will campaign for:

- A comprehensive cross-Government strategy for reducing homelessness and rough sleeping;
- Additional funding to enable councils to build more of the right homes that are affordable and family-sized;
- Increasing the rate of Temporary Accommodation Subsidy and Local Housing Allowance to more closely match average private rental costs, to support more people into temporary accommodation quickly where needed, and into more secure long-term housing whenever possible;
- Introducing an easier method for direct payment of the housing element of Universal Credit to landlords;
- Providing increased national funding for local authority temporary accommodation purchase to reduce the use of expensive hotel accommodation in emergencies;
- Reducing the use of short term grants from Government to local authorities to fund homelessness activity;

- Strengthening and reforming regulation of the private rented sector to improve its affordability, quality and accessibility including ending the use of Section 21 for evictions. Using the licensing scheme to reduce homelessness and improve conditions, without the tenant having to ask for improvements. This puts the onus on the council to inspect and improve PRS conditions, avoiding retaliatory evictions directed at tenants.
- Supporting local government to more effectively regulate local housing markets and make them work for local communities;
- Providing funding to local Councils to support move on from temporary accommodation for those currently in short-term hotel rooms;
- Continue to press the Home Office for early notification of eviction following asylum decisions to increase our opportunity to prevent homelessness;
- Providing funding to local Councils to increase the scale and use of Housing First models that combine housing with wraparound health, care and advice; and
- Local government needs to be part of building the next generation of council housing, looking at all potential models to increase supply.

Appendix 1 - Our Statutory Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Duties

The Homeless Reduction Act

National government have increasingly turned to Councils to intervene to prevent, reduce and relieve homelessness – the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 is the most recent example of this and has resulted in the most significant changes to the rights of homeless people and the responsibilities of local authorities in over a decade. The main pieces of legislation outlining Camden's statutory responsibilities are:

- The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 requires local authorities to prevent as well as respond to homelessness and assist people under imminent threat of homelessness (and classed as “in priority need”) by taking reasonable steps to prevent them from losing their existing accommodation.
- Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 sets out the duties owed by local housing authorities to someone who is homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- The Homelessness Act 2002 places a specific requirement for local authorities to produce and implement a Homelessness Strategy. The Localism Act 2011 enables Councils to discharge their duty permanently by making use of suitable accommodation in the private rented sector.
- The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 places a duty on local authorities to provide anyone threatened with or at risk of being homeless (within a 56-day period) with advice and support to prevent them becoming homeless. It also requires specified public - The Care Act 2014: Highlight duties to safeguard adults with care and support needs who may be at risk of harm.

In addition to this the following legislation is relevant to Camden's homelessness service provision:

- The Children Act 1989 and 2004 emphasises responsibilities to safeguard children and young people, particularly those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 references the duty to refer and prevent homelessness, ensuring multi-agency collaboration.

Appendix 2 - Relevant Camden Corporate Strategies, Policy Statements and Reviews

The following documents have been reviewed and taken into account in developing this draft Strategy:

The Housing Allocation Scheme in 2015 sets out who can apply for social housing (Council housing and housing association nominations) in Camden and how we use the social housing within the Borough to help those most in need.

The Homelessness Accommodation Strategy in 2016 sets out the Council's approach to preventing homelessness and providing sustainable housing options (e.g. through the procurement of suitable private rented sector accommodation), reducing the use of temporary accommodation and prioritising the Council's resources to tackle homelessness in the context of housing unaffordability. In this document, the Council identified its priorities and criteria for accommodating homeless households in Camden or as close as reasonably practicable.

We Make Camden is our Community Vision for our borough. We heard from our citizens and communities that housing is vitally important to every aspect of people's lives. For that reason, a key theme of our We Make Camden vision is that: "Everyone in Camden should have a place they call home"

In We Make Camden we make a number of commitments relevant to this Strategy, including that as a Council we will:

- Increase the supply of genuinely affordable, family-sized, and social rented homes by building as many as we can ourselves
- Use all our powers to compel and facilitate more organisations to deliver more affordable, high-quality, family size housing in Camden
- Focus our social housing resources to support those most in need in Camden, address overcrowding and improve people's health and wellbeing
- Reduce rough sleeping by investing in homelessness prevention, outreach and a "housing first" model – continuing to buy back our council homes to house homeless residents
- Use our powers to license the private rented sector in Camden with a focus on holding landlords to account in providing safe, decent and secure homes

The Routes Off the Streets Strategy (RTS) was introduced in April 2017 as a response to the significant increases in the level of rough sleeping in the borough. The overall objective of RTS is to ensure that all people experiencing rough sleeping in the borough access a service offer which means they no longer have to sleep rough and can start rebuilding their lives away from the street. The RTS strategy provides the framework for the delivery of street population services in the borough, identifies inter-dependencies and builds new partnerships to increase the impact, scope and quality of the services the Council is able to offer.

The **Rough Sleeping Review 2024** was undertaken in December 2023, following an investigation into the removal of tents from Huntley Street outside University College London Hospital. Camden reviewed its rough sleeping services, led by our Executive Director of Adult Social Care. This involved data and evidence analysis, interviews with Camden staff and practitioners from commissioned services and the voluntary sector in Camden, as well as consultation with neighbouring boroughs.

The review produced ten recommendations which included:

1. The Council should develop a fully costed proposal for an optimum rough sleeping system to meet Camden's needs;
2. Camden should ensure that future bids for short term funding ensure as far as possible that Camden can deliver sustainable and impactful rough sleeping services;
3. The Council should develop a strategic approach to enable more assertive influencing of government in respect of rough sleeping and the design of government funding that seeks to address rough sleeping in partnership with local authorities;
4. Move away from language that reflects a binary understanding of support for people rough sleeping and enforcement approaches, and develop a local framework that describes the right partnership interventions to tackle rough sleeping that correspond to the support needs of individuals and the circumstances of individual cases;
5. Work with local partners to ensure that as much flexibility as possible within the established parameters of CHAIN is applied to the verification of people sleeping rough. Work with local partners to ensure that where people do not meet the criteria for CHAIN verification there is an appropriate support offer available to them. Draw on evidence and learning from Camden initiatives regarding alternative verification processes of women and young people sleeping rough to lobby for changes to the CHAIN verification process that would provide for age- and gender-informed recognition of all forms of rough sleeping;
6. Review Camden's current out of hours response for crisis situations;
7. Share the final recommendations from this review with people with lived experience of rough sleeping to comment on in order to inform implementation;
8. Review Camden's approach to 'Off the Street' Accommodation with a view to considering Housing First at Scale Review Camden's approach to 'Off the Street' accommodation with a view to considering viable operational improvements in the short term as well as long-term evidence-based strategic change, including the viability in Camden of a Housing First approach at a scale that corresponds to the challenge of homelessness and rough sleeping in Camden that draws on evidence of best practice;

9. Ensure that current work to improve the health, care and support offer for people who have experience of sleeping rough is underpinned by a robust approach to evaluation;
10. Continue to take a broad and inclusive approach to the homelessness transformation work and the Rough Sleeping Forum; and
11. Continue to support and learn from the test and learn project that is exploring how the Shared Lives approach can enhance Camden's preventative work with asylum seekers living in Home Office accommodation, building on the opportunities that community willingness to help offer.

This Review is incorporated into this draft Strategy and will be taken forward in the actions that arise from this Strategy.

The **Homelessness Scrutiny Panel 2024** was set up in September 2023 by the Housing Scrutiny Committee to conduct a deep dive analysis into homelessness services across Camden. It was commissioned by the committee to understand more about resident perceptions of homelessness and the support that can be accessed. The Panel developed 17 recommendations for the Council:

1. **Utilise Stakeholder Insights:** Incorporate insights from interviews with partners and residents into the ongoing work of the Homeless System Partnership programme and senior housing management's improvement strategies;
2. **Facilitate Collaborative Forums:** Establish a forum for all partners, especially VCS partners, to ensure close collaboration and ongoing feedback mechanisms. Consider leveraging existing platforms such as the Camden Advice Network;
3. **Enhance Multi-Agency Working:** Encourage housing teams to consistently participate in multi-agency meetings, establish named contacts for key partner agencies within relevant housing teams to facilitate productive collaboration, and explore establishing a system to notify NHS partners when families have moved into the area, so they receive the correct support;
4. **Increase Training for Partners:** Ensure there are regular training opportunities for staff in partner agencies, including VCS organisations, on how to support service users through Camden housing processes. Consider including this in the distribution strategy for the new provision roadmap;
5. **Improve Support for Hostel Residents:** Develop specific plans to better support residents in hostels, including opportunities for feedback, monitoring, and consideration of formal time limits for hostel stays;
6. **Implement Trauma-Informed Approach:** Ensure the successful implementation and sustainability of a trauma-informed approach across housing staff through comprehensive training and ongoing support mechanisms;
7. **Expand Outreach at Physical Hubs:** Build on successful models like Good Work Camden by stationing housing officers at key physical hubs such as schools and community centres to improve accessibility;

8. Empower Frontline Staff: Embed frontline staff input within strategy development processes to foster a sense of ownership and facilitate effective change management. This should include staff from VCS and statutory partners;
9. Review VCS Funding: Conduct a review of funding for VCS partners to alleviate financial pressures and ensure continuity of essential services;
10. Enhance Communications: Review all communication materials in a year time to ensure clarity, accessibility, and inclusivity, including translations, simplified language, and replacing Word/PDF attachments with online forms. Consider options for reducing unacceptably long communication delays, including improved case management systems and clearer monitoring of KPIs relating to response times and case progression'
11. Review Out of Hours Provision: Consider the effectiveness of current out of hours provision and improve communication of how to access the current provision;
12. Streamline Processes: Review and streamline paperwork and internal processes to optimise officer time towards meaningful preventative work, improve efficiency, and enhance workforce retention;
13. Strengthen Internal Review Systems: Improve internal review systems to address complex cases promptly and minimise reliance on external enquiries for resolution;
14. Facilitate In-Person Services: Review arrangements for in-person services post-COVID to restore personalised interactions and support residents effectively;
15. Prioritise Housing Officer Capacity: Consider how to rebalance staff time further towards meaningful preventative work, such as ring-fenced time for this work and further capacity in dedicated prevention teams. Gather further data to show the positive value of preventative work to improve future business cases for investment in dedicated preventative capacity;
16. Promote Success Stories: Incorporate success stories into the communications strategy to build trust, motivate staff, and demonstrate positive outcomes; and
17. Review Points System: Conduct a thorough review of the points system's impact on homeless residents and ensure transparent communication following.

END